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OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Bay Saint Louis, Mississippi

June 2013

## COMING EVENTS AT LOBRANO HOUSE

The monthly luncheon meeting will be held on Thursday, June 20, 2013, at noon at the Kate Lobrano House. Guest speaker for the program will be Chris Christofferson, who will share her photographs of wildlife in our area and discuss the bird flyways here. **Reservations are required** and may be made by calling 467-4090. Please call *by noon on Wednesday, June 19, 2013*, to make your reservation, to help us plan seating which is limited to forty-eight people, and to apprise us of the number for whom to prepare. The price of the lunch is \$10.00.



Early railroad bridge across the Bay of Saint Louis

## ANNUAL CEMETERY TOUR

Even though October is still several months away, it's not too early to begin thinking about and planning the Hancock County Historical Society Annual Cemetery Tour. It will be held on Halloween night, Thursday, October 31, 2013, at Cedar Rest Cemetery on Second Street. We will need volunteers to help prepare the cemetery for the tour (mark the path, etc.), to portray citizens buried there, to act as guides, and to serve at the Lobrano House.

## Commuter Trains along the Mississippi Gulf Coast

By  
Eddie Coleman

After the War Between the States, the railway system in the United States blossomed. Connecting the eastern and western coasts was a project begun by President Abraham Lincoln, and even though he didn't live to see his dream brought to complete fruition, his forward thinking helped the nation industrialize and grow after its

great conflict. Comfortable travel by rail became the usual means of travel for most Americans, and commuter travel for businessmen became even more convenient. In fact at one time the Gulf Coast had as many as twenty-two passenger trains stopping daily at depots from Mobile to New Orleans. These runs began in 1870 with the completion of the railway bridge across the Bay of Saint Louis and continued for over one hundred years.

Of these twenty-two commuter trains which traversed the Gulf Coast, one was specific to the Mississippi Coast. It ran from Ocean Springs to New Orleans



THE

**HISTORIAN**

OF HANCOCK COUNTY

Eddie Coleman, Editor  
Jackie Allain, PublisherPublished monthly by the  
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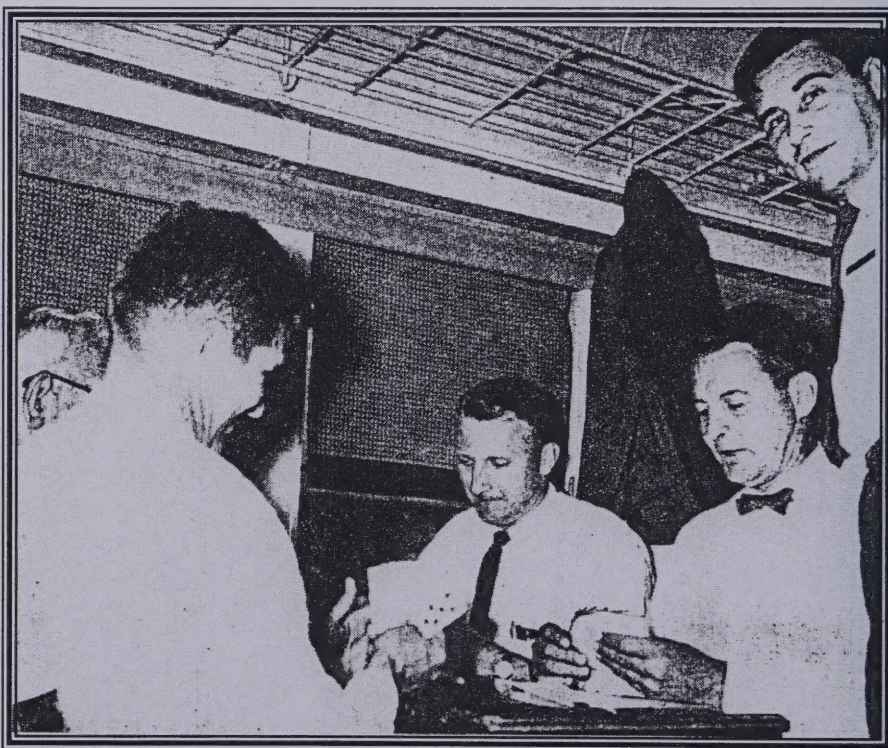
Monday through Saturday and served the cities of Ocean Springs, Biloxi, Gulfport, Pass Christian, Bay Saint Louis, and Waveland. Depots and boarding stops in Hancock County alone were numerous with facilities at Bay Saint Louis, Waveland (Nicholson Avenue, Coleman Avenue, and Waveland Avenue) Clermont Harbor, Lakeshore, Ansley, and the Baldwin Lodge. It left Ocean Springs at 7:00 A. M. and arrived at the New Orleans Union Passenger Terminal at 8:30 with one hundred to two hundred businessmen.

Seeing to the comfort and safe travel of the passengers were conductor Daniel J. Chancellor and engineer John Battiste White. Because their clientele usually consisted of the same businessmen, a close camaraderie developed between the railway employees and their

passengers and among the passengers themselves. At the end of the run, Chancellor collected items left on the train by the men, kept them safe, and returned the raincoats, briefcases, etc., at the commuters' next boardings.

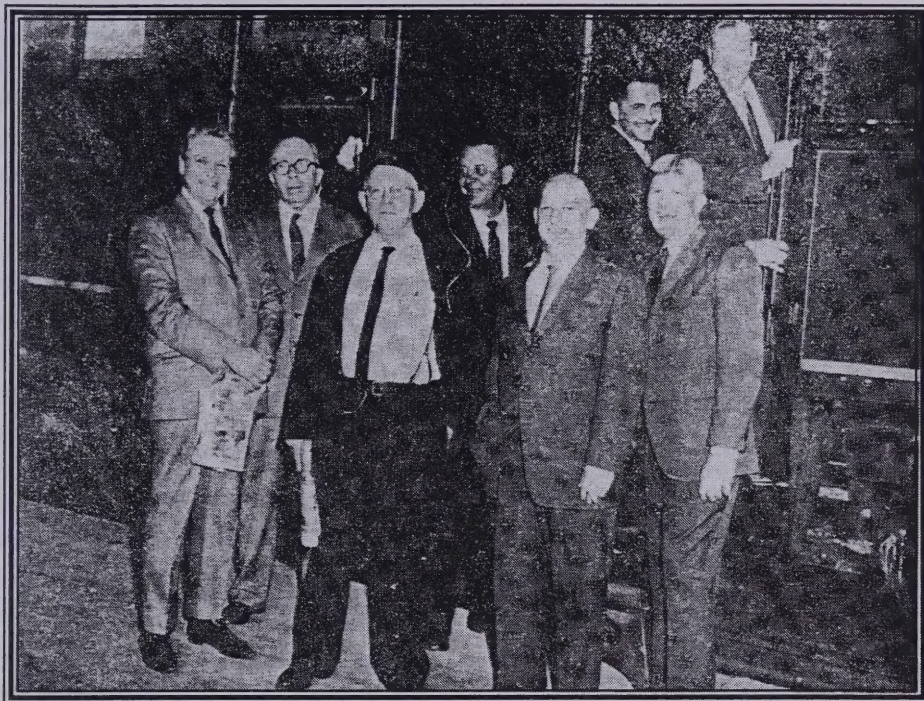
Although there were faster trains the men could take on their daily commutes, they chose this particular one because of its friendly and relaxing atmosphere. Often the businessmen passed the time by playing cards—bridge, gin rummy, or hearts. Some used the travel to catch up on business or even grab a catnap along the way. One commuter, the father of twelve children, even remarked that the only rest he got was on the train!

Reaching the Crescent City in time to begin the business day, the men disembarked



Men playing cards on their weekday commute from the Mississippi Gulf Coast to New Orleans—L to R Claude Baker [hidden], Bay St. Louis; Ben McGinnis, Pass Christian; Jack Bryan, Dick Mestayer, Jr., Dr. Sidney Ball, Waveland





Boarding at Waveland for the last ride of this commuter train on May 6, 1964 are (L to R) Mac Trelles, Rudy Vorbusch, Flagman Albert Biehl, Dick Mestayer, Jr., Max Giannelloni, and Gerald Kennedy, with Ronald Worrell and Doc Horn on the steps.

at the Carrollton or Union terminals and went their various ways. However, Mr. Chancellor retired to a hotel room for sleep. Even though his home was in Ocean Springs, his day had begun at 4:00 A. M. and would not end until about 10:00 P. M. after the late afternoon run back eastward and his retiring the train for the night. By 4:30 P. M., Mr. Chancellor was back in uniform and on duty at the Union terminal ready for the return trip to Ocean Springs.

The engineer, John White, was quite a character in his own right. A native of Ocean Springs, he had begun his career at the age of seventeen in the Louisville & Nashville shop at Mobile, steadily working his way up to engineer. Earlier in his career, Mr. White had run the *Smokey Mary*, an old wood-burner from the Mississippi

River to Lake Pontchartrain. Making seven or eight trips daily, the last one on Saturday nights could be quite tumultuous. He said that he and his workers often piled all of the drunks onto the last coach and then left them at the police station on Dauphine and Elysian Fields to sober up by the next morning.

Later in his career Mr. White saw many people on his Ocean Springs to New Orleans run, and they became those familiar acquaintances we see during our daily routines, but never really meet. They'd wave to him in the summer and flash porch lights to him in winter. In the afternoons young children waiting for their fathers at the various stops anticipated a friendly wave from Mr. White. So amiable was the relationship

between the train personnel and the commuters that the conductor, engineer, flagman, porter, and firemen received Christmas gifts each year from their passengers.

Time passes and things change; however with the last run of this particular commuter train on May 6, 1964, daily commuter service along the Coast did not end. In fact the *Hummingbird*, owned by the L&N Railroad, continued until January 1969 when high maintenance costs and a convenient and fast interstate highway system brought its demise. Nonetheless, a few remaining excursion/commuter trains held out and lasted until May 1971. They had such names as the *Azalean*, the *Piedmont*, the *Crescent*, and the *Pan American*. Although commuter service did resume for a short period of time during the summer and early fall of 1984 to coincide with the New Orleans World's Fair, it ultimately could not compete with the interstate highway system and the convenience of automobile travel. Thus, commuter service along the Mississippi Gulf Coast became a part of railway history.

[Editor's note: I could not find the name of this particular commuter train in any of our records. If you remember the name, please call the Society at 228-467-4090.]

#### SOURCES:

"Clickety Clack, Clickety Clack—Commuters Coming down the Track." *Dixie, the Times-Picayune States Roto Magazine*, 14 Oct. 1956, no page given.

"Commuter Service Begins on Daily Basis Sunday." *The Sea Coast*



*Echo*, 26 Apr. 1984, no page given.

"Flashback: Excursion Trains." *The Sun Herald*, 28 Mar. 1993, no page given.

"Last Commuter Train—1964." *The Sea Coast Echo*, no date given, no page given.

## Trains Come to the Coast

Edited by  
Scott Bagley and  
Eddie Coleman

Plans for the 140-mile Mobile to New Orleans route of the Louisville & Nashville Railroad were laid in the early 1850's. The first surveyor of the route, Colonel A. A. Dexter, died after completing plans for the first 120 miles. Subsequently, Lewis Troost replaced Dexter, and he recommended a route going southwest from Mobile to Pascagoula.

As a result of this route

change, the first marine obstacle was encountered: the split of the Pascagoula River into twin streams that enter the Gulf of Mexico about three miles apart. Along the rail route, the area between the forks consisted of sea marsh terrain, requiring extensive fill work as well as drawbridges.

Fourteen miles west, the route presented another challenge: the 6500-foot wide Biloxi Bay, which would require a long trestle and draw span. Similarly, the next major Gulf inlet was the two-mile wide Bay of Saint Louis, calling for a drawbridge with trestle.

Moving westward the new rail route crossed into Louisiana near the point where the Pearl River empties into the Gulf and then proceeded along the thin tongue of land that appears to separate Lake Pontchartrain from the Gulf. While the area between the Pearl River and New Orleans has been described as land, it is

actually a thirty-mile strip of salt-water marsh barely above sea level. The freshwater lakes north of this strip drain into the Gulf via two meandering rivers, both deep compared to the inlets at Biloxi and Bay Saint Louis. Six miles into Louisiana, the proposed route crossed the Rigolets Pass about three-fourths of a mile wide.

Before the final route was selected, Troost considered an inland alignment skirting the three major Gulf inlets in Mississippi. This route did not pass through the thriving coastal towns and would have required heavier grades and more curvature than the coastal route. Although the chosen route went where the people were and had virtually no grades or curvature, Troost knew it was far more vulnerable to the nemeses of shipworm and storms.

In the book, *Memories of the Route*, Troost warned future builders about the *teredo navalis*, the shipworm notorious for its destruction of pilings. Troost noted that the only exception to failed attempts to treat timber against the worms was a new process whereby bituminous material containing creosote was injected into the timber. This process coagulated the sap, protecting the fibers from moisture. The treated wood was stronger and waterproof, unaffected by exposure to alternating wet and dry conditions.

While the original route was chosen under the authority of the Mobile & New Orleans Railroad, construction of the line was undertaken by a new corporate entity, the New Orleans, Mobile & Chattanooga Railroad.



At one time the city of Waveland had two train depots—this one at Waveland Avenue; the other at Nicholson Avenue



Ceremonial groundbreaking took place at Mobile in 1867, but construction did not begin until February 3, 1869, under the direction of Chief Engineer Henry Van Vleck. Among the original construction contracts were those for 400,000 crossties, 2.6 million cubic yards of earthwork, 4500 feet of truss bridge, and 25,000 feet of pile and trestle bridging. Also, there were four iron pivot bridges for the Pascagoula River, Biloxi Bay, Bay of St. Louis, and Rigolets Pass with motive power supplied by Rogers Locomotive Works of Paterson, N. J. By the end of 1869, eighty miles of track had been finished, the entire line from Mobile to New Orleans being completed in twenty months.

In April 1871, the Mobile & New Orleans name was changed to the New Orleans, Mobile, & Texas Railway Company, reflecting plans to continue to Houston.

As foreshadowed by Troost, the primitive pilings which supported the railroad in the marshy areas were soon attacked by shipworms. Thus, a massive rebuilding was necessary, and this work pushed the construction to twice the original estimate of \$3.5 million before the line was opened in late 1870.

Because of the excessive costs combined with other problems, the New Orleans, Mobile, & Texas rail line defaulted on its interest payment for construction bonds in January 1873. Cutback remedies failed, and the company was compelled to do pioneer work

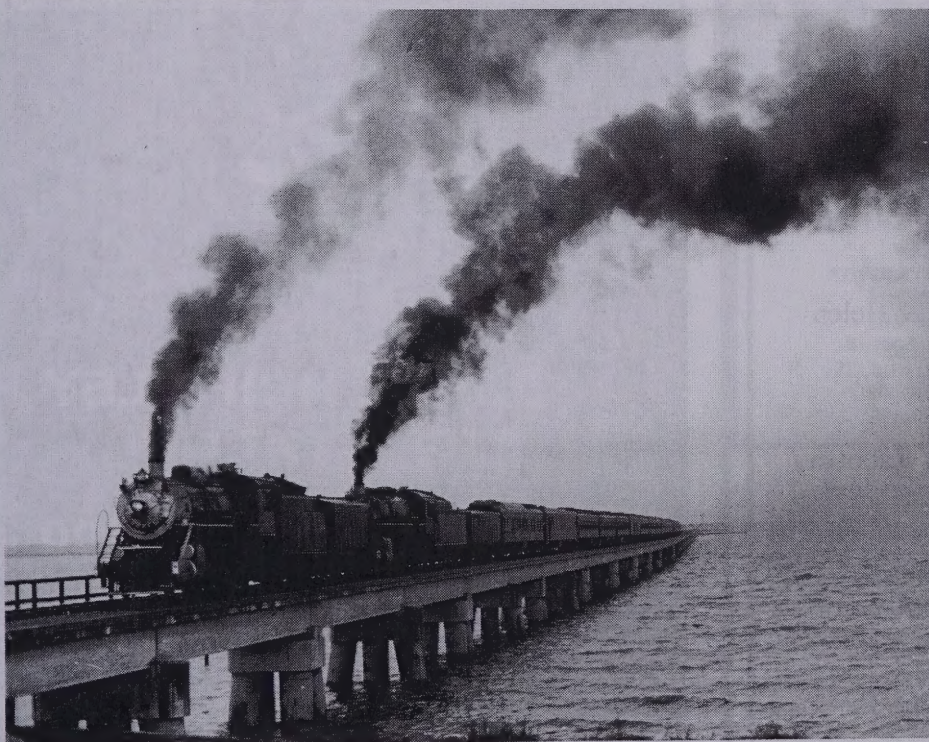
in timber preservation. In 1869 the railroad constructed the nation's first plant, at Gautier, to repel the *teredo* by soaking or boiling timbers in oil. Unfortunately, however, the treated pilings driven into the Bays of Biloxi and St. Louis were destroyed by the *teredo* within nine months! As a result, the company sent J. W. Putnam to England to study the new creosoting process.

After Putnam's return in 1874, he rebuilt the Gautier plant for the treatment of timber by forcing the oil under pressure into heated wood. Piles treated in this manner lasted for many decades. Hence, by the 1900's, this creosoting technique was used to prevent any kind of decay to crossties and pilings as well as bridge supports.

In conclusion, bringing railroads to the Gulf Coast was not an easy task. Miles of marshy terrain, rivers with divergent paths, and the ever-present shipworm presented challenges to these nineteenth century engineers. Nonetheless, they were equal to the task, and a dependable railroad line, which follows the same basic path today, was at last in place.

#### SOURCE:

Lachaussee, J. G. and J. Parker Lamb.  
 "The Railroad That Walks on Water—How the Old Reliable Reached Canal Street,"  
*Trains*, January 1987.



Southern Railroad Excursion  
 The bridge across the Bay of St. Louis





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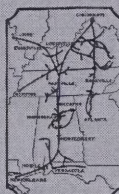
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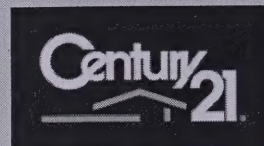
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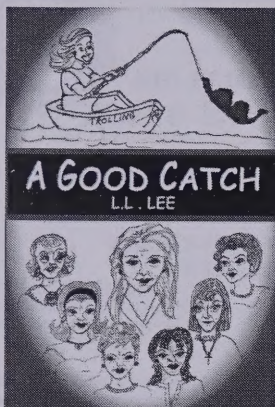


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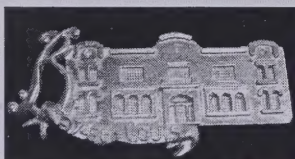
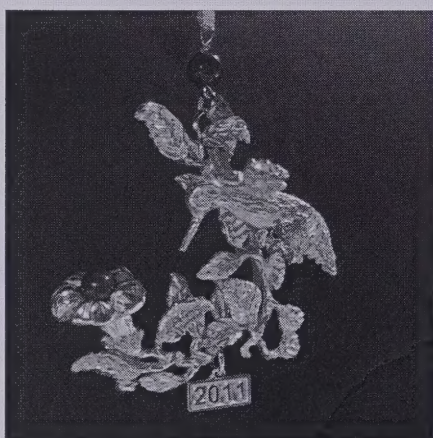
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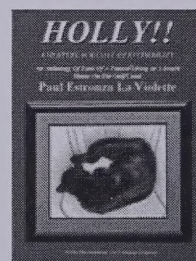
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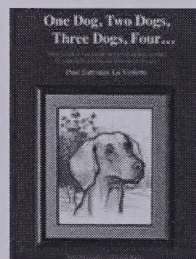
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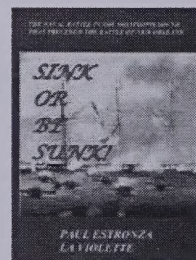
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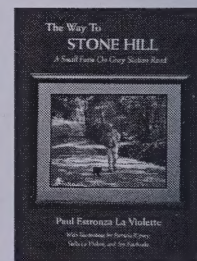
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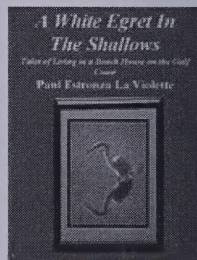
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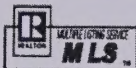
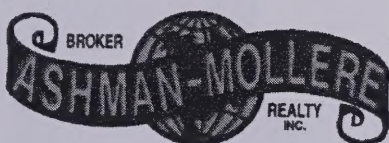
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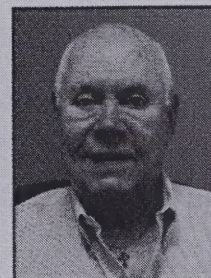
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